



ETHEL BARRYMORE

A SKETCH

By DELANCEY M. HALBERT

With portrait of Ethel Barrymore drawn from life by JOHN CECIL CLAY,
and printed in colors as frontispiece to this magazine



A FEW years ago a critic, while discussing a prominent player, said that his mannerisms constituted his personality. He meant that those characteristics that distinguished that actor from his fellows were the sum total of his individuality. The modern development of commercialism in the drama has made the actor's personality his capital; the starring system which has altered managerial methods so materially during the last twenty years has rendered the actor utterly dependent upon his personality (his attractiveness or his magnetism, as many phrase it) for his following. It rarely happens that study, training and thorough understanding of the stage are considered essentials nowadays in the manufacture of theatrical reputations.

There has been no better illustration of the power of personality on the stage than is furnished by Miss Ethel Barrymore. Her rise to fame has been almost meteoric. To her credit it must be said that the public has grown to like her, for the simple reason that it considers her a splendid example of the finest type of American girl. The average spectator who watches Miss Barrymore's work in the polite comedies Mr. Frohman has selected for her, will say nine times out of ten that she is "thoroughbred." Her abilities as a comedienne indicate both character and breeding; later when she shall have had time for the reflection and discipline impossible to so young a woman, they will doubtless reveal both insight and knowledge.

Miss Barrymore is one of the very few players who may be said to come from an American theatrical family; her grandmother's reminiscences, though, have told so delightfully about her ancestors that a retelling were superfluous.

It is enough to say that she inherits from her mother, the late Georgie Drew Barrymore, the graciousness, the eternally feminine quality, the keen sense of humor and the beauty that made that clever actress famous, while from Maurice Barrymore she has derived the wit, quickness, sympathy and courage that made him an idol to thousands. Miss Barrymore is in the fortunate position of the young player who has achieved applause and distinction in what might be termed the first flush of youth. Seven or eight years must elapse before she will have to set back the clock at the thirtieth mile post which is the dread of actor folk. She has come into fame very rapidly. It seems but a season or so ago when first she made her bow with her uncle, John Drew, in "The Bauble Shop." At that time Miss Maude Adams was Mr. Drew's leading woman and Mr. J. E. Dodson had a strong role in Henry Arthur Jones' satirical comedy. Miss Elsie DeWolfe was cast for the part of an English society leader, whose chief requirements were an easy manner in delivering patter and small talk, dignity of carriage and the ability to manage handsome frocks smartly. At a Wednesday matinee toward the close of the New York run it was announced suddenly that Miss DeWolf could not appear; the additional information was given that there would be an understudy. This was news to some of the members of the company as it was not stated that Miss DeWolf had an understudy, and, furthermore, no rehearsal had been held with the new comer. Naturally there was great surprise when it was announced that the understudy was Mr. Drew's niece, who was to walk on the stage for the first time in her life. One of Mr. Drew's support in describing the event, gave a rather good

line on Miss Barrymore's intrepidity and confidence in herself. He said: "I had heard of Georgie Drew's daughter, of course, and had counted myself among the most ardent admirers of the girl's brilliant mother; but this daughter's aspirations had never even been hinted at in my presence, and the public certainly was not prepared for it. The change in the personnel of the organization had the usual effect on us all, for, though we had 'gotten into our parts' thoroughly, during the protracted run of "The Bauble Shop," nevertheless nervousness reappeared when Miss Barrymore's debut was suddenly brought to mind. Meanwhile, we had been told that there was a rather exciting time in Miss Barrymore's dressing-room. Miss DeWolf's gowns were to be used by Miss Barrymore; one in particular I remember, for it was an affair in an excellent shade of blue with huge black butterflies scattered all over it. The dressmaker had so fitted it that the butterflies came in exactly the right places when the gown was originally designed. Of course, Miss Barrymore, then immature, practically a school-girl, did not quite fill the dress, whatever may have been the popular opinion as to her skill in filling the rôle. At any rate, I learned afterward that the maid nearly had hysterics in an effort to induce a refractory butterfly to perch on the shoulder when it persisted in alighting half way down the back. Well, the time for her cue came and the new actress left her dressing-room laughing; her uncle was already on the scene, and Mr. Frohman was 'out front.' But with everyone else on tenter hooks, this girl, who had never faced an audience before, walked on the stage with as much assurance as if she were about to recite her geography lesson in school. She went through the performance so neatly that one could hardly avoid the notion that she had been acting since she was a baby of five. And when she came off she was still laughing."

A brief engagement in Mr. Drew's forces seemed to fit Miss Barrymore very swiftly, her manager believed in

her from the outset, and about three years ago she became the youngest "star" in the world when she first interpreted a leading role in "His Excellency, the Governor." Subsequently Clyde Fitch's "Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines" served her as a vehicle, and now she is acting "Carrots" and "A Country Mouse," in which she has had an extraordinary vogue. Now more than ever her friends are sure of her future. She has demonstrated that she is at home in more serious matters than the frivolities of farce.

One of the benefits that success in art confers is the privilege of choosing one's friends; custom or a silly straining for effect has made it habitual with numerous profound philosophers to scoff at society, but those who carp admit at least the broad-mindedness of that element of society to-day that does away with the "rogues and vagabonds" attitude toward actors that existed in Elizabethan days. Now actors are joyously received everywhere, but no actor in America to-day is so freely and gladly admitted to what are regarded as exclusive circles as is Miss Ethel Barrymore. She possesses too much good sense, though, to permit anything to interfere with her artistic salvation, and her striking advance in her bits of dramatic portraiture during the past season or two determines beyond question that she is applying herself conscientiously to her task. Miss Barrymore is an exception to the rule that makes it almost impossible for the sons or daughters of noted players to gain any measure of renown in their profession. Sometimes she finds the family name a handicap as she once had to admit, for such a horde of her father and mother's friends tell her about their knowledge of her girlhood that she has had to threaten the publication of a short volume on "knees I have sat upon" before she could secure relief from the old stories about her childhood. The rich endowment of natural gifts which have made the early, the formative part, of her career singularly happy, seem to promise for her a far greater reputation in the future.